

Seven Hearths (Dr. Robert Murphy House)
157 E. King Street
Hillsborough
Orange County
North Carolina

HABS No. NC-223

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PHOTOGRAPHS
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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SEVEN HEARTHES

HABS No. NC-223

(DR. ROBERT MURPHY HOUSE)

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NC,
68-HILTB
14-

Address - 157 E. King St., Hillsborough, Orange County, North Carolina (Lot 30)

Present Owner - Dr. and Mrs. Robert J. Murphy
157 E. King St.
Hillsborough, N. C.

Present Occupant - Dr. and Mrs. Robert J. Murphy
157 E. King St.
Hillsborough, N. C.

Present Use - Private dwelling

Brief Statement of Significance - The central block of the house is an excellent example of early "Piedmont" architecture. All indications are that the basement room (under the central block) was used once, perhaps twice, as a tavern in the history of the house; and this is still in fine condition-heavy beams and great, arched fireplace. The west wing, built perhaps in the 1820's, is in itself exceptionally attractive. All of the early owners of the house have been significant figures in local history - William Reed, Barnaby Cabe, William Courtney, Thomas D. Watts, etc., and nearly all the later ones are persons of note in local government.

Date of Erection - Central block, before 1800; west wing, 1820's, northeast section added after 1877 although that portion, recent study indicates, is also a very early house.

Architect - None known.

Builder, supplies, etc. - No builder is positively known for any one of the three sections of the house.

Original Plan, Construction, etc. - The original section of the house is the tall central block, three bays wide, with tall, massive end chimneys. The basement has two rooms; the first floor had a narrow central hall with two rooms; the second floor was similar. The basement shows the massive construction of the house - great solid heavy beams. The west wing originally had a south door.

Physical History:

Original and Subsequent Owners:

1. Orange County Court Minutes, Vol. I. There are various references in early Court Minutes to William Reed's dwelling-house "near the courthouse". In the Court Minutes Reed petitions for a license to keep an ordinary at his house. Reed and his wife, Elizabeth Douglas, were living in Orange County in December, 1752, when he was appointed deputy to William Churton, public register. In 1753 he was appointed deputy clerk of the court; in 1754 he was also appointed Standard Keeper for the County. Reed's dwelling-house was in a very strategic position- at the junction of East King Street, the Great Halifax Road, and the Old Indian Trading Path - and it was almost inevitable that it should have been used as a tavern. (Court Minutes, I, 24, 53)

2. Sept. 8, 1755 (DB 1, 150-52) - William Churton sells to William Reed, "tavern-keeper" "Two Certain Lotts of Land (Nos. 30 and 40)...in Corbinton on the River Eno and on the North side of the main or great Street Commonly called King Street being the Town line to the East and a Lott (No. 29) belonging to John W. Nish on the West containing on the whole two acres...more or less as the same is laid out and staked...(Includes a provision for building within two years)...for 15 shillings sterling for each lot.
(Note: William Reed the elder died in 1764. There were five William Reeds)
3. October, 1768 - C. J. Sauthier's Map of Hillsborough drawn in October, 1768, shows various structures on Lot 30, none on Lot 40. On Lot 30 there is a dwelling house where the present house stands, two outhouses, a garden to the east of the house (where oral tradition still says it stood), and what seems to be a structure near or on the stream called the Still-house Branch running through the western edge of both Lots 30 and 40. Very likely an early still-house stood here if Reed kept a tavern in his house.
4. (No deed registered) _____ to Barnaby Cabe. Probably William Reed the younger sold the lots to Barnaby (or "Barney") Cabe shortly after his father's death in 1764.
5. Jan. 7, 1777 (or 1770), (DB 2, 57-58) - Barnaby Cabe sold the two lots, 30 and 40, to William Courtney, the prominent Quaker, for 80 pounds (in 1770 according to DB 8, 151-52).
6. Jan. 27, 1790 (DB 8, 151-52) - William Courtney, 20 years later, deeded the two lots, Nos. 30 and 40, to his grandson Josiah Watts, Jr...."for the natural love and affection which he hath and beareth unto the said Josiah Watts his grandson as also for the better maintainance (sic) and preferment of the said Josiah Watts...the said Lotts... purchased of Barney (sic) Cabe 7 January 1770...with all Houses, Outhouses, etc." (Note: Will of Josiah Watts, Sr., dated 6 July, 1788, leaves estate to his brother Thomas Watts. Evidently Josiah, Jr. died and left lots 30 and 40 to his uncle, Thomas Watts.)
7. _____ (No deed or will registered). Josiah Watts, Jr. conveyed Lots 30 and 40 to his uncle Thomas Watts.
8. June 18, 1799 (DB 9, 147-50, refers to this indenture) An indenture made "between Thomas Watts of Orange County and Africa Parker ("a free man of the Town of Hillsborough" formerly owned by William Courtney) arranging between them "a copartnership and Joint trade" in "the Art Mistery and business of a Distiller" for 12 years. Thomas Watts "did bargain sell, let and lease" to Africa Parker the western half of Lot 30 and the western half of Lot 40, "the said two Lotts to be divided by a line to be run from King to Tryon Street".
9. December 8, 1800 (DB 9, 147-50) - Africa Parker deeds in trust to William Cain, David Ray, and James Yarbrough, merchants of Hillsborough, as security for 3 separate debts his interest in the western halves of Lots 30 and 40 "with the Still-house thereon (on Lot 30) and in the two stills now standing and fixed in the said Stillhouse and in the stands Tubbs and other Utensils and implements"...
10. _____ Although no deed exists here, Thomas Watts, Africa Parker's partner, evidently paid the 3 separate debts owed and redeemed the western halves of Lots 30 and 40 (see DB 16, 340-41).

11. _____ (see DB 16, 340-41) Deed of gift (unregistered) from Thomas Watts to his three sons William C. Watts, Joseph Watts, and Thomas Watts of Lots 30 and 40 and a rural tract of 118 3/4 acres.
12. September 9, 1816 (DB 16, 340-41) A power of attorney is granted by William C. Watts and Joseph Watts of Christian County, Ky. to "our Trusty friend and Brother Thomas D. Watts" to sell and dispose of "one house and lot in Hillsborough on the main Petersbury street and also a part of a lot in said Town on a main Cross Street which we claim as by a Deed of Gift made to us and Thomas D. Watts by Our Father Thomas Watts"...
13. Nov. 21, 1818 (DB 17, 119-20) - William C. Watts of Christian Co., Ky., Joseph Watts of Caldwell Co., Ky., sell Lots 30 and 40 and a tract of 118 3/4 acres to Thomas D. Watts for \$700.
14. Jan. 30, 1834 (DB 25,480) - Thomas D. Watts of the Village of Chapel Hill sold Lots 30 and 40 to Stephen Moore for \$1600. (Note that the Watts family had owned Lot 30 for 44 years. In all probability Thomas D. Watts, a very prominent, well-to-do man, built the west wing of the present house.)
15. Nov. 25, 1842 (DB 30, 47-50) - Stephen Moore executes a deed of trust to Osmond F. Long and Edmond (sic) Strudwick to satisfy debts. This specifies Lots 30 and 40..."also his place of residence in the Town of Hillsborough including the two Lots Nos. 30 and 40 in the plan of said Town and all the buildings situate thereon..."

(Note: A 20-year gap exists here in the history of the house. No evidence as yet has been found as to how Lots 30 and 40 were acquired by John W. Garrard.)
16. Oct. 24, 1862 (DB 37,62) - John W. Garrard deeds Lots 30 and 40 to James M. Turrentine for \$30000..."bounded on the west by the lot known as the William Horton Lot and the Female Academy Lot"...."with the exception of any water privaledgos (sic) that may have been heretofore conveyed to the proprietors of the Tan Yard situated on the Lots south of King Street."
17. Feb. 26, 1868 (DB 39,381) - Hugh B. Guthrie, Sheriff, in consideration of 3 writs issued against James M. Turrentine, is ordered to sell Lots No. 30 and 40, "being the Lots on which the defendant James M. Turrentine now lives." These are sold at the Courthouse door on Feb. 25, 1868, to the highest bidder, David C. Parks, for \$356.
18. Dec. 30, 1871 (DB 43, 142) - David C. Parks sells Lots 30 and 40 "formerly belonging to James M. Turrentine" to Thomas J. Gattis for \$1250.
19. March 12, 1875 (DB 43, 148) - Thomas J. Gattis and Martha C. Gattis execute a deed of mortgage to the Hillsboro Building and Loan Association for \$600 plus interest.
20. Dec. 5, 1877 (DB 45, 447) - The Hillsboro Building and Loan Association conveys title to Lots 30 and 40 to David C. Parks for \$770.80.

21. Dec. 5, 1877 (DB 49, 431) - David C. Parks sells Lots 30 and 40 to Susan B. Hayes, wife of William A. Haycs, for \$800 (see Agreement between Susan B. Hayes and William A. Hayes, Jan. 17, 1876, DB 44, 312). Mrs. Susan B. Hayes added the third or northeast portion of the house, actually a separate house attached to the original.
22. May 27, 1925 - Will of Susan Beard Hayes, dated April 22, 1915. Will Book J, 340. Holograph will leaves store, house and Lots 30 and 40 to William Alexander Hayes to use and keep in trust for daughter Sue B. Hayes. Entire property to go to Sue B. Hayos.
23. July 8, 1937 (DB 105, 480) - Sue B. Hayes sells Lots 30 and 40 to J. E. Laws and Ora R. Laws for "\$10.00 etc." Note that the Hayes family had owned the lots from 1877 - 1937, a period of 60 years. J. E. Laws and Ora R. Laws subdivided the lots.
24. Sept. 12, 1949 (DB 132, 358) - J. E. Laws and Ora R. Laws sell Lots 1 and 2 of their subdivision, a lot 178' X 170', i. e., a portion of Lot 30, to Peter Taylor and Eleanor R. Taylor for \$100.00 etc." (See Map made by J. Ralph Weaver, Feb. 7, 1949).
25. June 22, 1955 (DB 156, 118) - Peter Taylor and Eleanor R. Taylor of Knox Co., Ohio, sell Lots 1 and 2 of the Laws subdivision, a lot 178' X 170', to Robert J. Murphy and Katherine Evans Murphy. The Murphys have restored the house.

Present Owners: Dr. and Mrs. Robert J. Murphy.

Notes on Alterations and Additions: The first addition was probably the one and a half-story west wing added in the 1820's. This was on a considerably lower level than the high main block, and steps lead down to it. A massive end chimney is in keeping with the other chimneys of the house. A diminutive staircase leads from the wing upstairs.

The house added by Mrs. Susan Beard Hayes during her ownership added considerably more space at the rear. It seems possible that this house itself may have been in two sections.

The Peter Taylors took out the east wall of the staircase thus throwing the staircase and east room of the main block together.

The two major additions have now produced a house on five different levels with steps going up or down to most rooms.

The most recent owners, the Murphys, have reconditioned the house thoroughly, uncovering the handsome arched fireplace in the basement and restoring an overmantel in the east room of the main block. They have added a spacious brick terrace at the rear.

Historical Events Connected with Structure: No particular historical event is connected with the house although the legend persists that General Thomas Person escaped the Tories by fleeing down the small stairs. This, however, would place the wing a good half-century earlier than it would seem to be. Africa Parker's still-house to the west of the house is of considerable historic interest, particularly when one notes that Sauthier clearly shows a similar structure on "the Still-house Branch" in 1768.

Various owners of the house have held posts of importance; Thomas D. Walts was Sheriff of Orange County from 1823 to 1832; Stephen Moore was a person of wide interests: he was a Commissioner of the Town of Hillsborough in 1835, a Trustee of The Hillsborough Female Seminary, a member of the Board of Superintendants of Common Schools and finally Chairman of the Board, etc., etc; J. E. Laws was Register of Deeds and held a national record for length of service in the post. Peter Taylor, a recent owner, is a writor of some note.

Early Views: None.

Sources of Information: (1) Deeds and Wills of Orange County, N. C., in the Orange County Courthouse, Hillsborough, N. C.; (2) Orange County Court Minutes in Dept. of Archives and History, Raleigh, N. C.; (3) Interviews with Mrs. Robert J. Murphy and Miss Sue B. Hayes; (4) Information from Mr. John W. Carr; (5) C. J. Sauthier's 1768 Map of Hillsborough.

Report Reviewed for HABS by Eleni Silverman
September 1983